

# Grandparents' guide to career learning for kids

How grandparents influence kids' career choices

By Dr Ann Villiers, *Mental Nutritionist*®, FCDA

jobs	careers	occupations	strengths	INTERESTS	skills	TRADES
professions		industries	labour market	CURIOSITY	reliable	
	EDUCATION	training	aspirations	explore	beliefs	
	choices	motivation	confidence	resilience	creative	learner
	problem solver		flexible	initiative	responsible	SOCIAL
SKILLS	courteous	INDEPENDENCE	honesty	EQUALITY	respect	
	self-reflection	creativity	tolerance	COOPERATION	self-control	
	empathy	persistence	social justice			

*Your life's wisdom + current career-related knowledge = inspiring impact*

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*How to Write and Talk to Selection Criteria*, 6<sup>th</sup> Edn. 2015

*Informational Interviewing: How to interview people to inform career decisions*, 2014

*A Manager's Guide to Career Conversations*, 2012

*Gorgeous Daring Dames, How to grow in confidence, clarity & commitment*, 2002

## **To the reader**

The ideas provided in this ebook, based on material current at the time of writing, are designed to help grandparents be informed about careers and how they can influence grandchildren's thinking about careers. The ideas are not prescriptive and must be used with judgement.

The ideas in this ebook are used by choice. Neither Ann Villiers, *Mental Nutrition®*, nor any associates imply, guarantee or take responsibility for the interpretations made, or the consequences of any decisions or actions taken by readers.

## ***Metaphors of the mind***

By Ann Villiers, *Mental Nutritionist*®

The mind is a garden full of nourishing mental flowers  
Like ideas, facts and images with strong, seductive powers.  
The mind is a lighthouse, a beacon in the dark.  
The mind is a terrier, with constant yapping bark.  
The mind is a smorgasbord, a tempting choice of goods.  
Of yes, no and maybe, of coulds and woulds and shoulds.  
The mind is a compass, pointing paths to take.  
The mind is a detective unearthing what is fake.  
The mind is an orchestra with violins, strings and horn.  
The mind is a game of chess and sometimes we're the pawn.  
The mind is a kaleidoscope, fresh views at every turn.  
The mind is an engine giving power to grow and learn.  
The mind is an orchard, with bounteous harvest to pick.  
The mind is a wardrobe, choose wisely, that's the trick.  
The mind is a glorious sulphur crested cockatoo.  
It can rip your thoughts apart, turn your day black and blue.  
So focus on the pluses, move forward to your goal.  
Make sure there's plenty of nourishment in your mental nutrition bowl.  
I leave with you a question, to think on, ponder, say.  
It's merely a suggestion. *What are you feeding your mind today?*

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# 1. Why a book for grandparents?

Grandparents can have a big impact on kids – their beliefs, attitudes, choices. And nowhere are these more important than in the area of careers.

Children form their beliefs about jobs very early, including what they might aspire to be and do, and what is relevant and appropriate. Depending on circumstances, these beliefs may expand options or limit choices, thereby having a lifelong impact. For children growing up in a changing and uncertain world, this is a serious matter.

Research indicates that childhood experiences affect identity, attitudes and ideas about work, available occupations and appropriate options. Plus, there is evidence that young people's career expectations are often unrealistic, poorly informed, and heavily shaped by gender.

[Australian researchers](#) have found that preschool children understand much about careers. Children as young as five years express occupational dreams. Having narrow, biased aspirations influences children's academic effort, the subjects they choose to study and the jobs they pursue. Research has shown that exposing children to wider information at an early age can change children's perceptions and choices.

In recognition of parents' influence on their children, plenty of resources are now offered to help them assist their children to make important career decisions. These decisions include subject, course and educational institution choices, and whether to take a gap year. Yet there are few resources available for grandparents. While much of what is directed at parents is relevant to, and useful for, grandparents, the roles differ significantly. The relationship is different, as is the time spent with grandchildren.

This ebook is designed to fill that gap. It is for those people who care for grandchildren on an ad hoc basis, rather than full-time carers, and who wish to influence their beliefs and interests about the vast opportunities the world offers. They may care for grandchildren for full or part days and for extended periods during holidays.

This ebook is broadly designed for young grandchildren, in the pre-school to primary school years. The suggestions offered are general, rather than targeted at a specific age or set of circumstances. This means you can adapt them to your circumstances, taking into account the many factors that make your situation unique. Given the vast range of circumstances grandparents may be in, with varying access to resources and facilities, the ideas offered are largely cost-free, requiring only some thought and effort.

The working world of the baby boomer is different from what grandchildren will experience. There's a risk that the suggestions you make, based on your experience, will not match today's reality. This ebook provides a summary of the contemporary working world and of research that hints at what the future may be like.

Career development research and literature points out that there are skills needed to effectively navigate the world of work. While your grandchildren may not be old enough to

consider paid work, they will still be exposed to a wealth of information and ideas about work. What grandparents can do is consciously think about the career-related learning that happens when they spend time with grandchildren.

Career-related learning refers to early childhood activities that give children from an early age a wide range of experiences of, and exposure to, work and learning. This learning is part of the career development process that involves developing the skills and knowledge that equip children for the next stage of their lives as well as enabling them to plan and make informed decisions and choices about their education, training and career.

While children are exploring their world with you, there are attributes, skills and behaviours that can be encouraged and developed with the aim of broadening horizons and raising aspirations. Such experiences help children explore a wider range of work and develop skills that will benefit them and others across the lifespan.

[UK research](#) has found that the extent to which young people can secure good-quality work, housing and relationships is shaped by whether or not they had four specific 'assets' to make a successful transition to adulthood. These four assets are:

- Appropriate skills and qualifications for their preferred career.
- Personal confidence and connections to help navigate the adult world.
- Financial and practical support to achieve goals.
- Emotional support from people they can be open and honest with.

Having some or all of these assets makes it easier for young people to make a smooth transition into adulthood. With this in mind, grandparents can contribute to some or all four of these assets.

I bring to this ebook knowledge and experience of the world of work, career decision-making, and the influences that can either limit or expand people's options and aspirations.

I don't have any grandchildren. I don't even have kids. So what would I know about grandparenting, you may ask?

A person doesn't need to have direct, lived experience to know something about a subject. Observation reveals a lot. So while this ebook is not based on actual grandparenting experience, it does draw on observations of what grandparents say and do, combined with knowledge and experience of career development and factors that influence a child's career beliefs, choices and interests.

This ebook is informed by these three perspectives:

- *Mental Nutrition*®: understanding our 'mental pantry' and its impact on what we think and say.
- Career development: understanding the importance of managing our careers and how to do that.



- Gender equity: understanding that gender is a social construct and believing that women are human beings equal to men.

I have drawn on both Australian and international research that informs these three perspectives.

There is one common thread across these three perspectives: respectful relationships. Social skills are critical for future work. Assessing the validity of information and how it is used is a vital skill in this digital age. And gender equity relies on respectful behaviour.

The material is deliberately presented in a general fashion so that you can adapt it to your personal circumstances. By considering this material you can play a role in broadening and raising your grandchildren's aspirations, building confidence and motivation, countering stereotypes, building an understanding of the value of education, and improving social-emotional skills. You can help them identify positive things about themselves and their achievements, what they are good at, how to make judgements about who to listen to when making choices, and how to compare the pros and cons of different choices so that they can make progress.

I have inserted into the text source material links and listed them under Source Material at the end of this ebook.

At the end of some chapters I've included photo boxes with questions (  ) inviting you to observe what's around you and explore the world with your grandchildren. There are also some resource boxes (  ) with links to websites that provide information about topics of interest to you and your grandchildren.

I start with a brief explanation of some career terms, as some of these may be unfamiliar. Knowing what these terms mean will help with gaining the most value from this ebook.

## **2. A brief explanation of some career terms**

Like most professions, career development has its terms, some of which may not be used in the same way as is commonly used. So it's best to know how some of these words are used in order to understand what career information and advice are referring to.

### **What is career development?**

Career development is the term used these days when talking about careers. Rather than thinking only in terms of 'what will I do when I grow up' or 'what career will I plan for', career development is about a life-long process. It is relevant to any stage of a person's life and is defined in [Australia's professional standards](#) as about "managing life, learning, work, leisure, and transitions across the lifespan in order to move towards a personally determined future". In other words, it's about a range of knowledge, skills and behaviours that we need to manage and develop our learning, employment, and transitions (such as education to work, changing jobs, reskilling, retrenchment, retirement) throughout our life.

I'll explore what this means in more detail in the Chapter 6 on What does it mean to manage your career?

### **Words used to describe people who help with careers**

A Career Advisor is a qualified professional who helps people with making decisions about careers. A Career Advisor may also be further qualified to help people build self-awareness and understanding in order to work out their career direction and may be called a Career Counsellor.

You may also come across the terms Career Coach, Career Guidance Officer, Career Educator, Career Development Practitioner, or Career Practitioner. These professionals provide a wide variety of services to diverse client groups in various settings. Places where you may find Career Practitioners are schools, higher education (e.g., TAFE and universities), business organisations, government agencies and private practice.

The services provided include career counselling, career advice, career education, job placement, employment services, recruitment, career coaching, training, mentoring and coordinating work experience or internships programs.

Not all people who use these terms to describe their work are professionally qualified or belong to career development professional associations.

### **Words about work**

There's a group of words that seem to be about much the same thing: work, job, occupation, career, profession, trade. These terms have specific meanings both in the career



development profession and when used in official information, such as government statistics.

To explain these terms, I'll draw on the glossary in the [Professional Standards for Australian Career Development Practitioners](#) and Australian government usage.

Work is more than paid employment. It's a set of activities that also includes parenting, care work and volunteering.

Part of work is a job, for which a person is paid. A job also means there is a relationship between an employed person and their employing enterprise.

Career is broader than work. It is a "lifestyle concept that involves work, learning and leisure activities across the lifespan. Careers are dynamic, unique to each person, and involve balancing paid and unpaid work and personal life roles."

An [occupation](#) refers to a group of jobs that involve a similar or identical set of tasks. Official [statistics](#) group occupations into eight categories according to their tasks and skill level. The most highly skilled groups are Managers, Professionals, and Technicians and Trades Workers. The lowest skilled are Labourers, Machinery Operators and Drivers, and Sales Workers.

A Profession refers to "a disciplined group of individuals who adhere to, and uphold, ethical standards and are accepted by the public as possessing special knowledge and skills learned from research, education and training at a high level, and who exercise this knowledge and skills in the interest of others." Examples of professions are Accountancy, Psychology, Engineering, and Career Development.

If you are interested in skilled trades then look at occupations defined as Technicians and Trades Workers. People in these occupations "perform a variety of skilled tasks, applying broad or in-depth technical, trade or industry specific knowledge, often in support of scientific, engineering, building and manufacturing activities." The qualifications needed range from Certificate III or IV to Diploma with two to three years of experience.

Examples of industries where these occupations are found are engineering, ICT, automotive, construction, telecommunications, food, animal and horticulture, hairdressing, textile and clothing.

Tasks required in these occupations range from "carrying out tests and experiments, and providing technical support to Health Professionals, Natural and Physical Science Professionals and Engineering Professionals", and "providing technical support to users of computer hardware and software", to "repairing and maintaining motor vehicles, aircraft, marine craft and electrical and electronic machines and equipment", "shearing, caring for, training and grooming animals, and assisting Veterinarians" and "propagating and cultivating plants, and establishing and maintaining turf surfaces for sporting events".

People in skilled trades are not to be confused with Labourers, who perform “a variety of routine and repetitive physical tasks using hand and power tools, and machines either as an individual or as part of a team assisting more skilled workers such as Trades Workers, and Machinery Operators and Drivers”. Qualifications range from compulsory secondary education to Certificate I to III.

Examples of industries where Labourers are found are cleaners and laundries, construction and mining, factories, farms, forestry and gardens, and food preparation.

The work of Labourers requires skills and knowledge. Tasks include “spreading, levelling and finishing concrete and bituminous paving materials, and assembling and erecting scaffolding and rigging”; “assisting with cultivating and harvesting crops, plants and forests, and with livestock production” and “loading and unloading freight from trucks, trains and ships, and stocking shelves in stores and supermarkets”.

Another term you may encounter is industry. [Industries](#) refer to groupings of businesses and other organisations that are mainly engaged in similar activities. Within each industry, people are employed across a wide range of occupations of varying skill levels. For example, the Construction industry covers the construction of buildings and other structures, additions, alterations, reconstruction, installation, and maintenance and repairs of buildings as well as blasting, test drilling, landfill, levelling, earthmoving, excavating, land drainage and other land preparation.

### **Words about understanding ourselves**

Another set of words that are useful to understand includes ones used by career practitioners to help people understand themselves. Some key ones are skills, interests, strengths and values.

A skill refers to our ability to “perform a particular mental or physical activity which may be developed by training or practice”. Examples of skills are problem solving, negotiating, writing reports, customer service, operating a crane, driving a bus, and teamwork.

What a skill means in practice depends on the context in which it is used and the amount of skill needed for that context. For example, customer service covers a range of behaviours (such as a friendly manner, courtesy, helpfulness, knowledge of products and services), will vary depending on where the work is done (such as a hotel reception, an IT helpdesk, a call centre), and will vary in the demands of the work. For example, a person calling with serious complaints or calling about an emergency, will need a response from someone with higher-level skills than a retail assistant.

Strengths can be skills, qualities or knowledge. They are what we are good at, enjoy doing, are interested in, and when we apply our strengths we generally produce a good result.

We all have strengths. Not all of our skills are strengths. I can prepare an edible meal but doing so may not be a source of enjoyment nor do I feel highly committed to learning more and doing more of this task.

Some strengths are obvious, others are noticed by paying attention to more subtle behaviours. You may notice that your grandchild is well-coordinated when playing with a ball, loves building complicated Leggo structures, or spends hours reading or painting. What may be less noticeable are qualities like honesty, friendliness, helpfulness, or curiosity. Observation is needed to see that a child is good at listening, taking turns, accepting differences, asking for help, solving puzzles, learning new words or mentally adding up numbers.

Interests are what we like to do. They are important for careers because work that interests us is more likely to be enjoyable, keep us motivated, and we'll perform better.

On any day we're faced with a range of tasks. Some we'll be eager to do, others we'll find any excuse to delay doing them. Career practitioners think about careers in terms of groupings of interests. These groupings identify the main tasks people like and dislike. For example, people vary on whether they like to:

- Work in teams or alone.
- Work with their hands or their head.
- Decide what to do or have clear instructions to follow.
- Have a structured day or be surprised at what the day brings.
- Work indoors or outdoors.
- Pay attention to details or focus on the 'big picture'.
- Help people or build things.

There are quizzes that help people to identify their likes and dislikes. As a grandparent, you can give children a wide range of experiences so they can discover their likes and dislikes, as well as notice and comment on their likes and dislikes so they build an understanding of themselves.

Values are core principles that are important to us. They influence how we behave, our relationships, our decisions, including career decisions. Finding work that aligns with our values will be more fulfilling and satisfying.

While some values, such as health, family and respect, apply to life in general, other values are more directly related to work, such as security, recognition, and money. Some values are important to employers, such as commitment and integrity.

Grandparents can model their own values and foster values in children, particularly those that will be useful in life and in careers. Examples of values are:

- Broadmindedness: tolerant of different ideas and beliefs
- Curiosity: interested in exploring many subjects and places
- Equality: equal opportunity for all

- Helpfulness: working for the welfare of others
- Honesty: sincere
- Independence: self-reliant
- Meaning in life: having a purpose
- Protecting the environment: preserving nature
- Responsibility: reliable
- Self-respect: belief in one's own worth
- Social justice: correcting injustice, care for the weak.

There are online tools that help with identifying values and these can provide a useful basis for discussing what's important in life.



**Q**. What are lichen? What is a moss?

**R**. Learn more about lichens and mosses at the [Australian Antarctic Division](#).

### 3. How you can help grandchildren with exploring careers

Children may be aware of a relatively small number of occupations due to what they are exposed to, such as doctor, dentist, teacher, firefighter, police officer, shop assistant, hair dresser, and whatever it is their parents and relatives do to make a living. Learning about other occupations broadens their choices and increases the odds that they will be able to find careers that are suitable and satisfying.

Parents often lack sufficient information on the full range of options, are unaware of the diversity of jobs available in different sectors, and the link between school, post-school education and vocations. For example, people can hold inaccurate ideas about [vocational](#) education, thereby discounting a wide range of opportunities.

[Young people](#) form their aspirations and ideas about careers long before they are ready to join the labour market. For example, children at an early age rule out jobs that do not fit with their gender. Grandparents can play an important role in helping children to broaden their horizons and raise their aspirations. Important questions you can help children answer are:

- Who am I?
- What are my opportunities?
- Who do I want to become?
- What is my plan for achieving my goals?

You can help grandchildren to explore diverse careers and occupations by finding information online and asking people about their jobs. Chapter 13 suggests some questions you could ask. Talk about the jobs you see others doing – someone you know, people you see on the street, on television or in magazines. Be open to possibilities. Avoid judging any ideas that seem unrealistic or unsuitable. Children's choices and interests change over time, as do those of adults.

You can also help grandchildren to learn about themselves by discovering their interests, values, and strengths.

Cultivate curiosity by encouraging your grandchild to explore, discover, and find out more about what a particular job or occupation involves.

Develop your grandchildren's interests. Starting at a young age, take them to museums, art galleries, zoos, historical sites, cinemas, concerts, sporting events and the theatre. Expose them to many different things and see what they express an interest in.

Show grandchildren what you're interested in so they can discover if they are also interested in those things. Have them sit with you while you watch a sporting event, or have them help you cook dinner. If possible, take them to work with you and show them what you do.

Encourage your grandchild to write down goals about what they would like to learn or try, then help them achieve these goals.

Perhaps one of the most valuable things to do is to let your grandkids dream, and dream big, when it comes to their future careers. Maybe they see themselves as an astronaut, a movie star, or a neurosurgeon. No matter what the goal, keep in mind it may change, and that what's important is to encourage their interests, continued learning, and expanding horizons.



**Q.** Why do leaves change colour in autumn?

How does reflection work?



**Q.** How high can you climb?

## 4. A scary future?

The future of any society depends on its ability to foster the health and well-being of the next generation so that today's children become tomorrow's productive and responsible citizens, workers and parents.

Yet the future seems uncertain and scary. [Australia](#) faces serious challenges including food security, climate change, sustainable energy and resources, and security in our region. A growing and ageing population is placing greater stress on Australia's cities, infrastructure and government services. Trust in both public and private institutions has fallen.

Reports tell us that young people fear they will not find jobs that match their qualifications. [Media stories](#) tell of hundreds of jobs disappearing due to automation. [Youth unemployment](#) has increased, fewer young people have full-time work, and the journey from school to the workforce is taking longer, and becoming more precarious. Housing is unaffordable for many and youth homelessness is significant.

Yet other articles point out that mass unemployment hasn't come to pass, automation is not a zero-sum game, there is no inevitability about technological development. [James Boyce](#), in his insightful essay tracing the history of technology during the last 100 years, suggests that 'old' technology from the twentieth century has been far more indispensable than changes of the computer age. Which would you prefer, a flush toilet or your mobile phone? Clean water or fast broadband?

Compare the tools used by trades decades ago with today and you'll find many of them haven't changed much (such as hammers, pliers, nails). While young people focus on today and tomorrow, grandparents can offer valuable historical knowledge and put things in perspective.

[Dr Jim Stanford](#) has also challenged aspects of this supposedly scary future, pointing out that some concerns are based on misunderstandings and misdiagnoses. He points out that technology is not actually accelerating. The spread of robots, AI and other labour-saving technology is slower than expected and that there is nothing new about the so-called gig economy. We have always had precarious employment practices.

[Youth Action](#) says that "Young people should live happy, healthy and fulfilled lives that give them a strong foundation for their mental wellbeing" yet "1 in 4 young people aged 16–24 experience a mental illness." [Beyondblue](#) tells us that it's estimated 45 per cent of Australians will experience a mental health condition in their lifetime.

Beyondblue also points out that: "Mental health and wellbeing is established early in life and provides children with the foundation for all aspects of their development including physical, educational, social, emotional and cognitive development." Parents, carers and other significant adults play an important role in their child's development and in building and protecting their mental health and wellbeing. In many cases, children who have good mental health carry it with them through life.



One area that grandparents can influence is building resilience. Resilience refers to a child's ability to cope with ups and downs, and bounce back from challenges and difficulties. Resilience is not only important for mental health generally, it is also important for managing a career throughout life. By learning how to respond to change people are more likely to cope with an uncertain future.

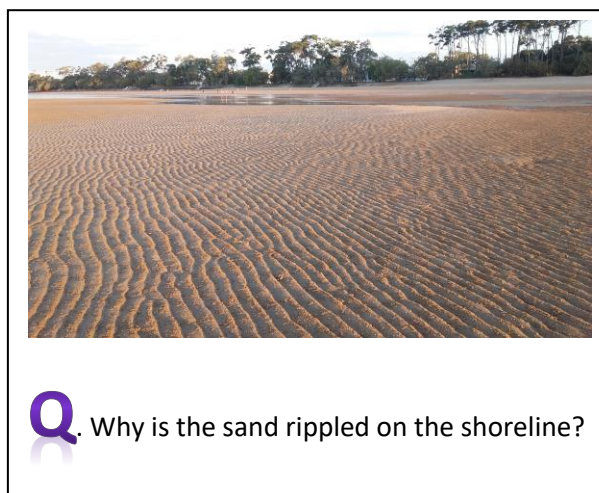
As a grandparent you can help develop the skills, attitudes and habits that build your grandchildren's resilience. [Beyondblue](#) identifies four areas that affect resilience:

- Building good relationships with others, including adults and peers
- Building independence
- Learning to identify, express and manage emotions
- Building confidence by taking on personal challenges.

These four areas are also important career development skills. We can examine trends that indicate what might happen in the future, but we can't predict the future with certainty. This means that one of the greatest gifts you can give grandchildren is to foster skills that will help them cope with whatever lies ahead.

While the many reports describing a scary future are useful, some of these reports are exaggerated and based on flimsy information. Be aware of the trends, and encourage children to build happy, healthy lives. And be reassured, as [Pennington and Stanford](#) point out, paid work is not going to disappear. Australia's economy cannot function without it.

That said, it is useful to know how the world of work has changed, as what your grandchildren face may be different from your own experience.





## 5. How the world of work has changed

When we think about work, our own experience comes to mind. We may have worked for one or a few employers, held those jobs for extended periods of time, benefited from employers' training programs, and experienced little or only modest change. Job opportunities may have been plentiful and full-time employment the typical arrangement, at least for men. Careers may have been linear in nature, progressing along a path within a defined occupation.

The world of work has been changing during recent decades so your own experience of work may not be what your grandchildren will experience. The way we work has been, and will continue to be, altered by:

- Globalisation: the interaction of people, companies and governments worldwide.
- Digital technology: information and communications technology (ICT) providing new ways of working.
- Gig economy: employment arrangements will continue to change with more people working in less traditional contracts for various employers.
- Automation: people will increasingly work alongside machines that carry out more routine tasks, while humans will perform the work that is harder for machines.
- Individualism: people have less loyalty to employers and employers take less responsibility for career management.
- Information: the volume of online information will continue to increase.
- Climate change: we'll experience more extreme weather events, with significant impacts on ecosystems, food security, health, infrastructure.

Most sectors are affected to varying degrees. The reality is that the workplace is diverse, jobs change, disappear, and evolve, and professions, industries and sectors are not static.

The boundaries between jobs and industries will continue to blur with jobs evolving, merging and emerging. No longer do people have a 'job for life'. Nor do people necessarily experience a linear career path. They may change jobs or occupations many times throughout their working lives and the working arrangements may be uncertain. Jobs disappear and new jobs are created. A single qualification is unlikely to be sufficient for an entire working life and people now need to take responsibility for their training, retraining and skill development.

The one thing that can be said about the future is that it is uncertain, so making comments about work based on your own experience may be misleading. People need to be skilled in managing their careers in order to work within this uncertain context. Hence, your ability to influence grandchildren in developing the skills they will need becomes critical to their future success in life.

What is important for making informed career decisions is to accept that things will change, to build resilience in the face of change and uncertainty, and to understand that ongoing learning is part of work and life. Grandparents can help children build resilience and understand that learning is more than formal education and continues throughout life. They

can do this by modelling these behaviours themselves and providing activities that foster these skills.

These skills are all part of managing a career. But what does that mean in practice? Next I'll set out some of the key elements of career management so you can see how what you say and do fits into career-related learning.



**Q.** Who lives in the sand?



**Q.** What are the road rules  
for cyclists?

## 6. What does it mean to manage your career?

If you had access to any career advice as a child it may well have been about choosing school subjects and post-school courses. It probably didn't include preparing you for the world of work and how it would change over time.

Managing your career is now seen as an important set of skills, attitudes and knowledge that we need in order to make sound choices throughout life. This process is much broader than choosing subjects and courses, although these are still important decisions.

The term career development is now used to refer to this process of managing your career. Qualified professionals who work in career development understand the standards and frameworks that apply to their services and programs. They also understand that:

- Careers often develop in unintentional ways and can change multiple times.
- Managing a career is not a simple process and is a lifelong journey.
- People's life, learning and work opportunities are influenced by personal circumstances and characteristics across the lifespan. These include family, community and cultural values, geographic, economic and social circumstances, age, gender, ability/disability, plus unpredictable events.
- Managing careers is an active process that involves learning a set of skills.
- People need to actively engage in learning throughout life.

The [Australian Blueprint for Career Development](#) is a framework for designing, implementing and evaluating career development programs for young people and adults. At its core, the Blueprint identifies the skills, attitudes and knowledge that individuals need to make sound choices and to effectively manage their careers.

The Blueprint identifies eleven career management competencies which are grouped into three areas. These competencies focus on personal management, learning and work exploration, and career building.

As this ebook focuses primarily on younger grandchildren the following skills are selected as most likely to be influenced by grandparents:

- Knowing who we are: Exploring and identifying interests, likes and dislikes, personal qualities, strengths and weaknesses and discovering how these form the basis of a positive self-concept.
- Knowing how to deal with changes.
- Understanding the value of learning throughout life.
- Building communication and interpersonal skills that enable us to help a diverse range of people.
- Developing good health habits.
- Understanding how choices are made and understanding how our personal beliefs and attitudes affect our decisions and the impact of those decisions.
- Discovering the nature of gendered life and work roles and exploring non-traditional life and work options.

- Being able to express personal feelings, reactions and ideas in an appropriate manner.
- Knowing how to solve problems, including interpersonal problems, and being able to ask for help.
- Demonstrating creative ways of performing work activities.

There are a number of qualities that are considered desirable in Australia for people in general, as well as in the workplace. Grandparents can foster some of these qualities:

- Loyalty
- Commitment
- Honesty and integrity
- Reliability
- Positive self-esteem
- Adaptability
- Resilience.

While career practitioners have specialised skills, grandparents, through their interactions and experiences with their grandchildren, can foster many of the skills and attributes needed to succeed in life. For example, they can help children to know themselves by identifying what they're good at, their likes and dislikes, and what's important to them. They can expose children to a wide range of experiences and help with making choices, solving problems, and seeing that assumed gender limitations are unfounded.

Later in this ebook I explore a range of literacies (see Chapter 12) and offer suggestions on activities that foster career management skills.



**Q.** How old is this tree?

## 7. What we think and say affects careers

In Chapter 1 I wrote that part of my perspective for this ebook is *Mental Nutrition*®. I developed the concept of *Mental Nutrition*® to capture some ideas about how we think and talk and why it is important to notice how we ‘feed our minds’ and stock our ‘mental pantry’.

Imagine your mind as being like a pantry, stocked with goodies that help you make sense of your world, events that happen to you, how other people behave, how you respond. This process is partly conscious and much of it is unconscious, drawing on assumptions, expectations and beliefs that we are barely aware of.

Children stock their mental pantry based on what they experience and what people show and tell them. As a grandparent, being aware of what is stocked in your mental pantry will help with choosing how to influence your grandchildren. Doing a stocktake of what’s stocked in your mental pantry, particularly as it relates to careers, will help with identifying what’s important and valid, what’s passed its use-by date and needs replacing, and what is missing.

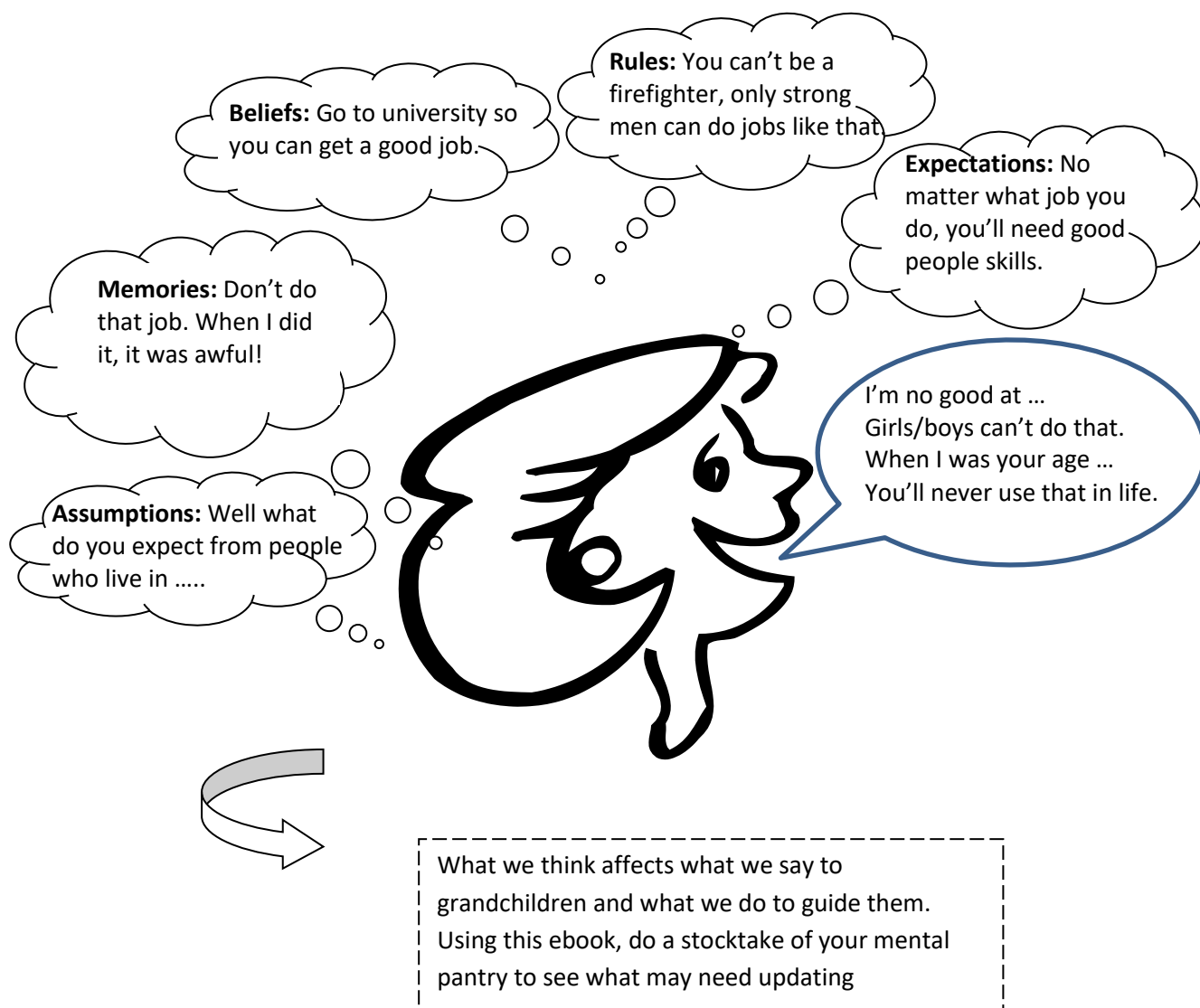
To help build your awareness of what is stocked in your mental pantry, consider the following elements and how they apply both to yourself and to children.

**Beliefs**—these are the ideas we hold about how the world works. Beliefs are different from facts. Sometimes we think our beliefs are true but they may not be. It is a fact that the world is round. Some people may choose to believe it is flat. We build up a range of beliefs about work, occupations, and learning which we may present as ‘the facts’. The changes outlined in chapters in this ebook on work, skills and gender raise the possibility that some of your beliefs may be past their use-by date and need updating. We are works in progress, so change is possible.

**Rules**—these are the ‘musts’, ‘shoulds’ and ‘can’ts’ that we subscribe to. Some rules are based on what others have told us (such as parents or friends), some on experience, and some we make up. Without giving them conscious thought, our rules can limit our options. For example, if we tell a granddaughter, ‘you can’t be a firefighter, only men should do those jobs’, we establish a rule that excludes a career option from further consideration.

**Expectations**—when confronted with something new we will have expectations about the outcome and what will happen next. Our expectations are linked to past experiences, beliefs and rules. They will drive our fears, since we create a picture of what will happen, based on what has happened in the past. Your past experience of work may drive expectations that no longer apply to your grandchildren.

## Our Mental Pantry: What we think affects what we say and do



**Please note** that the examples in this diagram are illustrations. I'm not suggesting these are all valid items to stock in your mental pantry or statements to express.

**Assumptions**—based on past experiences we make assumptions about what people may be like, how they may behave, and what may happen. Some assumptions aren't based on experience, but on hearsay, the media, or we just make them up. Assumptions can be particularly important when meeting people who seem different in some way. Rather than focusing on what we have in common, perceived differences and the assumptions we make about them can lead us to set an unhelpful example to children.

**Memories**—the assumptions and expectations we have about the future draw on our memories of previous and related events, including family and friends' experiences. One nasty experience can taint our future views of similar experiences.

Each of us engages in this selective attention and each of us interprets our world according to what's going on between our ears, or in our mental pantry. This is why we arrive at different interpretations of the same event. This is how we come to set unhelpful limitations on ourselves and others.

What is critical to understand is that our reality—how we see the world—is constructed by our brains. We think what we see is real, yet others may see things differently. Accepting this will help us to adapt to changes, get along with others, and understand our own responses.

Your grandchildren may hold back from being all that they could be by letting the stuff in their mental pantry get in the way. They can interpret real or imaginary events in ways that restrict their options. Helping children to understand the beliefs, assumptions and rules that underpin their choices is one of the most valuable gifts you can give them.

What's important here is to:

- Know what's stocked in your mental pantry.
- Choose language wisely.
- Help unearth children's assumptions, beliefs and expectations, examine them, and consider their value, opening the possibility of making different choices.

### **What we say matters**

There are common sayings that suggest that the words we use are unimportant, such as 'Actions speak louder than words' and 'It's not what we say but how we say it'. But utter a 'naughty' word, or be called a nasty name, and we quickly realise that there's little truth in the saying 'Sticks and stones may break my bones but names will never hurt me'.

The words we use are powerful. When it comes to grandchildren, they will hear what you talk about, how you speak about yourself and other people, and how you respond to them. What seem like minor choices can have a big impact on building your grandchildren's social skills as well as helping them appreciate their own skills and abilities and the opportunities available to them.

We can say things that reinforce stereotypes and close off options for children to consider. For example:

- I'm no good at ... [maths, science, art ...]
- Us girls ... [when referring to women]
- That's not for girls/boys.
- When I was your age ...
- I'd never do that job/Who'd want to do that job?
- That's too dangerous/adventurous/risky.
- I don't like ... [types of food, categories of people]

Such comments can inadvertently say to children:

- I'm no good at something so you probably won't be either.
- Don't respect women.
- There are things that you can't or shouldn't do because of your gender or other factor.
- Some people/jobs are beneath me.
- Don't take risks or try anything new.

These are not messages that will be helpful to managing a career.

### **Compliment often and praise effort**

Children can come up with amazing ideas, ones that are impractical, unrealistic, pure fantasy. A squelch might pop out of our mouth in response. Squelches are comments that act as wet blankets, dampening further discussion, killing off bright ideas. Typical squelches are:

- That won't work.
- That's all very well in theory, but ...
- It can't be done.
- Has anyone else ever tried it?
- We've never done it that way before.
- It's too risky.

When you catch yourself about to utter a squelch, stop and consider an alternative such as:

- Let's try it.
- Why don't we test it out.
- If we do that, how would we know whether it succeeds or fails?
- If it doesn't work we'll try something else.
- Let's see if we can find a way to make it work.

These options help build curiosity, a willingness to test and learn, an ability to take risks and solve problems, all essential to managing a career.



When complimenting grandchildren, pay attention to skills, qualities, behaviours:

- 'Jake, that was a strong kick right through the goal posts.'
- 'Sonja, that was an accurate hit which I couldn't reach. Well done.'
- 'Ryan, that picture shows lots of imagination. I really like it.'
- 'Sally, you're really smart to have worked out that puzzle.'
- 'Jack, that was a really kind thing to do, to lend your friend your favourite book.'

Praise often and realistically. Be proud of effort in the face of difficulties. The best kind of praise is genuine, specific and spontaneous.

And praise effort. We send an important message to children when we praise what they do rather than what they achieve. It shows that we value the hard work that has gone into achieving a goal rather than the goal itself, thereby relieving some of the pressure to achieve and win.

So you might choose to say: 'Well done for working so hard for your science test.'

Rather than: 'Well done for getting top marks on your science test.'

This is especially important when children experience failure. How you respond helps them to learn valuable lessons when they try and fail, then try again and possibly succeed. Such experience helps with learning to assess risks, building resilience, and learning from mistakes.

### **Openly discuss 'shoulds'**

Discuss with grandchildren any 'good' should that you insist is followed, such as washing hands before a meal, eating with a knife and fork, saying please, thank you and excuse me. Such 'shoulds' are based on sound principles and values.

Also discuss the messages children get from others about what they 'should' do. These 'shoulds' are not necessarily right or wrong, but they could include pressures to conform to out-of-date ideas about what's appropriate for a boy or girl, suggestions to behave inappropriately, or set limits to goals and dreams.

Children learn early to put pressure on others to conform and fit in. This can make [decisions](#) difficult to make as they are pulled between wanting to fit in and being true to themselves.

### **Challenge inaccurate beliefs**

Girls and boys often develop inaccurate beliefs about themselves, which can become self-fulfilling prophecies and damage self-esteem. For example, a girl who does badly in a maths test can quickly become anxious about the subject, perhaps disengaging from it in order to

protect herself from further ‘proof’ that she can’t do it. You can help her to learn from the experience by reminding her of times when she has failed at first and gone on to succeed.

By exploring wider options you can help grandchildren to develop their resourcefulness and commitment to learning new skills.

### **What example do you want to set?**

What you say and what you do will set an example for anyone listening and watching. Children are quick to notice any inconsistency between the two, particularly if what we say involves telling others what they should do, while not doing it ourselves.

Behaving consistently is a tricky business and none of us is without some hypocrisy. The window to influence grandchildren may well be small, so it’s worth being aware of what’s stocked in your mental pantry and giving thought to what you say and do. Changing what you think may not come easily, however when it may impact a child’s career-related learning, it’s worth making the effort.

In Chapter 12.5 on Civics Literacy I mention some of the behaviours that show we support our local community and are civic-minded, including sharing interests in volunteering. Being involved in the community not only helps people, it is also a useful way for young people to gain useful experience and build skills valued by employers. For example, helping out at a food co-op can teach how to be organised, how to relate to a wide range of people, how to prepare and serve food. Being involved in a citizen science project develops an interest in a particular field, and skills such as teamwork, recording information, being observant.

As we’re focusing on what’s stocked in our mental pantry, it’s worth being aware of some of the myths that exist about careers. Knowing about these gives you the chance to counter misunderstandings and provide a more realistic perspective.



**Q.** Why do trees have different bark?

## **8. Some myths about careers**

If you search online you'll find endless advice about careers, some of it suggesting you can 'future proof' your career if you do certain things. Some of this advice is unrealistic, and some of it is just plain wrong.

To help with separating fact from fiction, I've set out 12 career myths to watch out for. Knowing these myths will help you guide chats with your grandchildren about subjects to study, courses to take, interests to follow.

### **Myth 1: Find your perfect career**

Any literal interpretation of this phrase is ridiculously unrealistic, as is the variation, 'Find your dream job'. Today's 'perfect' career may well be tomorrow's defective, flawed path. A well-matched career may work for now and, combined with career management skills, keep a person on a satisfying road. No one path though, can promise perfection.

### **Myth 2: Future-proof your career**

This myth often comes with those dire warnings of employment catastrophe resulting from robot and artificial intelligence take-overs. If we accept that the future cannot be predicted, we must surely focus on the present, informed by the past, alert to trends and opportunities, with the skills to effectively respond. Even armed with all of this, the future is still uncertain.

### **Myth 3: Find and follow your passion**

Passion is a strong emotion. Not everyone identifies with having a burning desire that compels them towards a particular subject, skill or industry. Some people have multiple passions, some have none at all. Many build a love for what they do after building skills, gaining confidence, forming friendships, and achieving some level of success. Satisfying work isn't necessarily based on passion.

You don't have to be passionate about your career for it to be enjoyable or satisfying. What is important is to find a career that matches your skills, interests, values and personality. There are plenty of jobs that a person could find interesting, without having to be passionate about it.

### **Myth 4: You can be anything you want to be**

This is another unrealistic promise, sometimes linked to the childhood question 'What do you want to be when you grow up?' and offered to girls to encourage them to 'have it all'. While not wanting to exclude options, career choices are not limitless. Even a 'passion' or

'dream' may be beyond reach. Expand horizons yes, but let's make sure we're honest and realistic.

### **Myth 5: Choosing a career is simple**

Choosing a career is not simple. There is much to know, learn and decide. It is a complex process that must be given the time and attention it deserves. First, you must learn about yourself, including your skills, interests, work-related values and personality type. Then you must gather information about the careers you are considering. Taking these steps will allow you to make an informed decision about which occupations are a good fit for you.

Choosing a career is not a once-only decision, a set-and-forget exercise. With an uncertain future, people need to be actively managing their career throughout life. At the same time, thinking you need a 5-10 year plan is not very realistic. Much can change within such a timeframe. So have an active plan for the next 12 months and regularly review it.

### **Myth 6: A career expert can tell you which job or occupation to pick**

No, a career development expert can't tell you what career to choose. They can help you learn about yourself and then help you identify what careers are suitable for you based on that information. You will have to do your homework and then make the final decision after considering everything you have learned about it. Once you have chosen a career, the career practitioner can help you find out what training you will need to reach your goals and then show you how to embark on a successful job search.

### **Myth 7: You should rely on in-demand job lists**

Some people are fond of publishing lists of 'hot' jobs, predicted to be the ones that will guarantee work.

The Foundation for Young Australian's report, [\*The New Work Mindset\*](#), points out that much information paints an incomplete picture of the future of work. The focus is on listing the top 10 jobs of the future, the industries or roles that are predicted to grow quickly, or the advanced digital skills required. The writers suggest that what would be more useful is to inform young people about the skill patterns that exist in the labour market and will persist into the future. Their report identifies seven job clusters to help young people navigate work, the skills acquired from one job that are portable to other jobs. They also point out that rather than thinking of technical skills as specific to a particular job or task, we should recognise that many technical skills appear across multiple occupations and are not just specific to a single job.

So, while it may be useful to look at such lists, they are not a good basis for a career decision. They may not appeal to you or suit your skills and interests. Things change. This year's current trend may change as market conditions change.

### **Myth 8: Earning a lot of money will make you happy**

While salary is important, it isn't the only factor you should look at when choosing a career. Surveys have shown that money doesn't necessarily lead to job satisfaction or being happy. For many people, enjoying what they do at work is much more important. However, you should consider earnings, among other things, when evaluating an occupation. You have to make enough money to pay the bills and to live the lifestyle you want.

Career decision-making needs to take account of what your strongest skills are and what you enjoy. We work for many years so it's important to do something that is enjoyable.

### **Myth 9: Your skills will go to waste if you decide to change careers**

No matter how many times you change careers or jobs, you retain your skills. You can use many of them in a variety of occupations and expand them to meet new applications.

### **Myth 10: The best way to get a job is to go to university.**

Just having a degree, or even several degrees, does not guarantee that you find a job. While a degree or other qualification, provides a foundation of knowledge and related skills, ability to communicate, get along with people, and be able to confidently present your skills are also important.

There are many valuable qualifications to consider apart from those obtained at universities and while qualifications may get a foot in the door to a career, it doesn't mean you're locked into this career path for the rest of your life.

### **Myth 11: Once I'm qualified I can relax**

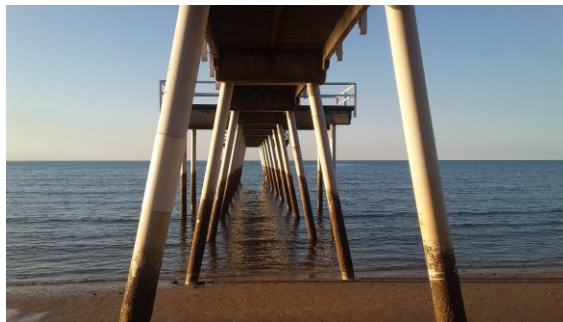
Once you've completed qualifications you still need to manage your career so that you can respond to opportunities, adapt to unexpected changes, and continue to learn and build skills. As workplaces change, you need to be willing to learn new skills and stay current with existing skills. It is you, not your employer, who needs to take control of, and manage, your career.

### **Myth 12: Career development is for people who want to climb the corporate ladder**

Career development is not about the desire to climb the corporate ladder and become a manager or CEO. While some people may wish to focus on hierarchy and promotions, others may be more interested in work that challenges them and/or makes a difference. Career development is not about the position, job title or status, it's about you and what makes you happy at work.

So keep in mind there's no perfect job, but there are many great jobs that suit a person's interests and values, and provide satisfaction. Knowing what a person wants to do may not be clear early in life. Some people know from an early age, others don't find their calling until decades later. What is important is to develop the skills to manage your career so you can deal with whatever life throws at you.

As well as helping children to understand their interests, strengths and values, it's also useful to help build the sort of skills that any person will need in life. Next we look at what we know about what skills people may need in the future.



**Q.** Why are these support posts on an angle?

## 9. What skills will people need in the future?

Much has been written about what skills people will need for this uncertain future.

Reports indicate that in-demand jobs will mix high tech, personal contact and care activities, and that people will need a mix of digital and social skills.

Young people will need to spend more hours learning on the job as they respond to new information and new technology when making decisions.

Future workers will spend less time on routine tasks and more time with people and getting value from technology. A Foundation for Young Australians [report](#) gives an example to illustrate the changes:

“A future pharmacy assistant will likely cut the time spent on store administration, such as stocktaking and ordering, from 22 hours a week to 6 hours by 2030. This will allow pharmacy assistants to spend over four times more on digital tasks, such as updating the business website, developing an online shopping app and analysing monthly sales data.”

The Australian government provides [information](#) about what types of skills will be in demand in the near future. Some of the skills most frequently identified by Australian companies in a 2019 survey conducted by the World Economic Forum are listed below. These skills are highly transferable, meaning they will be valued by many different employers across a range of industries and roles:

- “Creativity, originality and initiative
- Analytical thinking and innovation
- Active learning
- Technology design and programming
- Complex problem-solving
- Critical thinking and analysis
- Leadership and social influence
- Emotional intelligence
- Reasoning
- Resilience, stress tolerance and flexibility.”

Other skills that may be needed include the ability to:

- Operate in different cultural settings.
- Critically assess and develop content that uses new media forms.
- Understand concepts across multiple disciplines.
- Manage and filter information for importance, relevance and accuracy.
- Apply entrepreneurial skills to identify problems and create solutions.
- Work productively as a member of a virtual team.

The skill that crops up in most lists is the ability to learn throughout life. The [Victorian government](#) points out that an important part of a child's idea of themselves is:

“the picture they have of themselves as learners: is it okay to be curious, to explore, to ask questions, to tackle problems, to try to figure things out, to experiment? Is it okay to try something and fail sometimes? Being a good learner means having a go, seeing yourself as capable, and taking reasonable risks.”

While suggestions in this ebook are linked to a range of skills, one of the gifts grandparents can give children is a strong sense of being a learner. Fostering [curiosity](#), tackling problems, asking questions, having a go—these all contribute to this sense that learning is worthwhile.

One skill-set that is consistently mentioned as needed by employers and in future jobs, is social skills. These are the skills that enable us to get along with other people and deal with the hiccups that occur between people. Why are these skills so important? I'll explain this in the next chapter.



**Q.** Whose poo is this?

**R.** Learn more about scats (poo) at ABC Science, [What scat is that?](#)



## 10. Why social skills are so important

In addition to environmental and economic challenges, societies are also facing social challenges. Communities are being reshaped by increasing social and cultural diversity. In large parts of the world inequalities are widening, conflict and instability are increasing. While young people need to prepare for the world of work, they also need to be equipped with the skills to become active and responsible citizens, with the social and emotional skills to live and work with others.

An [OECD report](#) explains that children and adults live in a highly interconnected world where 'how you interact' matters. Social and emotional skills are receiving increasing attention from researchers and educators because: "The ability of individuals to adapt, be resourceful, respect and work well with others, and to take personal and collective responsibility is increasingly distinguishing those communities and societies that are building improved social cohesion and economic growth and those who are not."

Further, the [report](#) states that: "Developing social and emotional skills allows children and young people to navigate this complex environment, shaping their everyday interactions with friends and family. These skills are a fundamental part of the skillset all individuals need in order to function and thrive in today's changing world."

The OECD has started a major [project](#) on social and emotional skills. They recognise that people increasingly need to trust, and engage and cooperate with diverse people. Developing these skills is important for the well-being of individuals and for communities and societies as a whole.

Plus, research reports about the future of work recognise that social skills will continue to be important and higher-level social skills will be in demand due to growth in sectors needing these skills, such as health and aged care, and the difficulty of automating these skills.

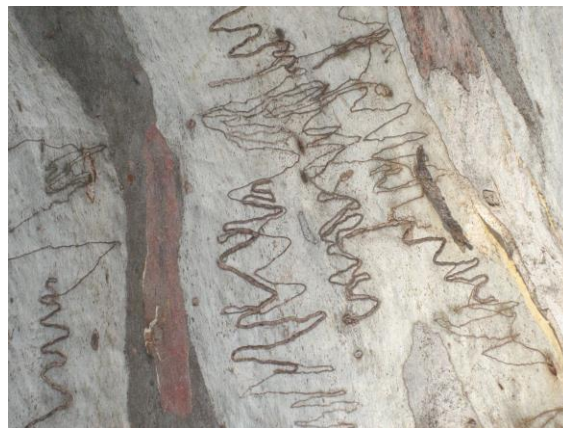
The OECD's work on social and emotional skills concerns how people manage their emotions, perceive themselves and engage with others. They study 15 skills spread across six broad domains. Another [report](#) provides a useful description of the skills with examples to illustrate what they mean. I've listed some of the key skills that grandparents are likely to influence through their activities with grandchildren.

- Achievement orientation: enjoys reaching a high level of mastery in some activity.
- Responsibility: honours commitments, is punctual and reliable.
- Self-control: able to avoid distractions and focus attention on the current task, know what behaviour is accepted.
- Persistence: finishes tasks and activities rather than giving up easily when faced with obstacles or distractions.
- Emotional control: can resolve conflict and regulate temper, anger and irritation in the face of frustrations.
- Empathy: kindness and caring for others.
- Trust: lends things to others, avoids being judgemental.

- Cooperation: finds it easy to get along with people.
- Curiosity: likes to read books, travel to new destinations, learn new ideas.
- Tolerance and respect: has friends from different backgrounds, appreciates foreign people and cultures.
- Creativity: generates novel ways to do things, is good at the arts.
- Sociability: able to approach others, both friends and strangers.
- Assertiveness: able to confidently voice opinions, needs and feelings.
- Self-efficacy: believes in own ability to do tasks and achieve goals.
- Critical thinking: good at solving problems.
- Self-reflection: aware of own thoughts and feeling, able to reflect on and articulate them.

There is plenty of evidence demonstrating the links between specific social skills and important life outcomes. They influence academic achievement, job performance, occupational attainment, health and longevity, and personal and societal well-being.

Through what you say and do with your grandchildren you can help build these important skills so that boys and girls grow up with the best chances to succeed in life.



**Q.** What is a Scribbly Gum?

## 11. Why gender is important

Most Australians agree that inequality between women and men is still a problem in Australia today.

People may confuse gender with sex. Some differences between men and women, such as appearance, are linked to biology. Gender describes the characteristics that a society or culture defines as masculine or feminine.

From birth onwards, society works to confine behaviour within rigid lines—children are taught which colours, TV shows, toys, games, clothing, activities and books are for boys and which are for girls. The ‘Princess’ culture encourages girls to prize physical appearance and likeability over intellectual ability. Many toys aimed at boys encourage the limited idea that masculinity is about action and winning. Boys soon learn that showing feelings is unmanly.

We’re surrounded by messages that reinforce what it means to be male and female, so it’s easy to fall into the trap of reinforcing stereotypes. Just take a look at newsagents’ card and magazine racks, toys and clothes stores, and advertising for Mothers and Fathers Days, and you’ll quickly see how the world is divided into pink and blue, boys’ and girls’ stuff.

The National Union of Teachers (NUT) in the UK worked for two years with five primary schools to consider how gender stereotypes could be challenged in nursery and primary classrooms. Their publication [\*Stereotypes stop you doing stuff\*](#) points out:

“Stereotypes are invidious things. They underpin prejudice and discrimination and place constraints on people’s lives... they often prevent us from doing things we want to do – or oblige us to make choices that, without the pressure to conform to such rigid expectations, we might not make.”

[Australian researchers](#) have found that preschool children understand much about careers. Children as young as five years express occupational dreams. Pre-school children establish ideas about what girls do and what boys do and by age four can have gender-based beliefs about occupations. Such beliefs can limit aspirations, choices and opportunities, cutting off both girls and boys from exploring options that suit their skills and will affect their life experiences. Exposing children to wider information at an early age can change children’s perceptions and choices.

So, it’s important for us all to be aware of the power of gender stereotypes for at least two critical reasons, so we can:

- model and encourage respect for all people and particularly girls and women, and
- avoid reinforcing stereotypes of occupations and thereby limit grandchildren’s opportunities.

Gender inequality is still a significant issue in Australia. While a [disturbing number](#) of people continue to think that gender inequality is exaggerated, the facts are that girls and women’s life experiences are significantly affected by outdated gender stereotypes, biased thinking,

and a range of behaviours that undermine women, limit their options, and destroy their lives.

Attitudes that undermine gender equality include suggesting:

- Men make better leaders or are more suited to holding positions of power.
- Men should make decisions and control what happens in families and households.
- Men and women are naturally suited to different tasks, roles and responsibilities.
- It is okay for men to be aggressive and disrespect women by talking in ways that are sexist.
- Gender inequality is not a problem.

This means that grandparents can help children by challenging rigid gender roles and identities, and by promoting attitudes that foster a mutually respectful approach to people. While some of the ideas below may seem small and hardly worth bothering about, the sum of these small steps will help build wise, respectful grandchildren who have the broadest set of options.

Cordelia Fine, in her book *Delusions of Gender*, makes reference to work of developmental psychologists Carol Martin and Diane Ruble, who suggest that children become 'gender detectives', searching for clues as to the implications of belonging to the male or female tribe. Grandparents can play a valuable role in building their grandchildren's gender detecting skills, by being observant and discussing the accuracy and fairness of these observations. Here are some suggestions, drawing in part on NUT's publication [Boys' things and girls' things](#), for building respect and challenging gender stereotypes

- **Books:** Select books that [challenge gender stereotypes](#). Draw children's attention to stereotypes and discuss how they affect characters in books.
- **Beliefs:** Discuss why some people believe that things are only for one gender. Ask why girls can't do this or boys can't like that.
- **Challenge choices:** Offer gentle challenges whenever children make stereotypical choices, comments or assumptions.
- **Toys:** Encourage children to notice how toys are marketed as being for boys or girls and be willing to play with a range of toys.
- **People:** Stress similarities between people rather than differences.
- **Advertising:** Notice when women and men are treated in ways that reinforce stereotypes. Examples are: scantily clad women (or men); a bunch of businessmen with no women present; a woman cooking dinner with a man sitting at the dining room table nearby; a woman doing the laundry.

- **Jobs:** Notice what jobs people do including when women and men are performing atypical roles. Talk to people about what they like about what they do and how they achieved their goals. (See Chapter 13 for ideas)
- **Strengths and interests:** Encourage and support strengths and interests in all activities, without regard for gender stereotypes. Challenge ideas that people need to be strong to do certain jobs, and therefore are only available to men, or that some jobs require people to be kind or caring and therefore are suitable for women. Focus on asking 'would you like to do that job' rather than asking whether a man or woman could do a job. Point out that many jobs that look like they need strength involve machines that anyone can operate, and that many women are stronger than many men.
- **Language:** When police officers and fire fighters are referred to as 'policemen' or 'firemen' correct such terms by referring to them with the same term regardless of gender. Remember to use non-gendered terms yourself when describing jobs, regardless of the gender of the individual performing them.
- **Language:** Explain why sexist and sexualised language and bullying are inappropriate—it's more than being rude or unkind. Help children to understand why it is harmful, that language is an indicator of attitudes and views, and to challenge it for themselves. Common examples are using 'girl' as an insult with boys; calling girls 'slag' or 'tart'.
- **Leaders:** Notice when leaders, particularly political leaders, are treated differently in media reporting. Discuss why focusing on women's appearance and family responsibilities is not relevant and disadvantages women. Explore what difference it would make if the reversibility test was applied.

[Name It. Change It.](#) is an American non-partisan project working to end sexist coverage of women candidates by all members of the press—from bloggers to radio hosts to television presenters. From their research, they have found the most workable definition of equality for journalists is reversibility. If terms used for women candidates would not be used for men, then stop using them.

- **Behaviours:** Encourage girls to be as noisy and rowdy as boys. Offer boys a broader view of masculinity, one that includes expressing feelings and respecting others, particularly girls and women. Encourage boys to reflect on their own behaviour. For example, do they sometimes play too rough and could these behaviours exclude some children who might like to join in.
- **Sport:** Draw children's attention to how a limited number of men's sport dominates the media. Look for reports on women's sport and on sports that are typically not given much attention. Challenge sexist sports coverage, such as focusing on women's looks and clothes, referring to women as 'girls', and naming events as 'Women's Final Tournament' (men's events are usually called 'Final Tournament').

- **Body image:** Encourage girls to build a strong, flexible body and to place importance on all their skills, including their thinking skills. Avoid using descriptions of boys and girls that reinforce stereotypes, e.g. girls are pretty, cute, attractive while boys are strong, boisterous, powerful. (Also see Chapter 12.6 on Health and Well-being Literacy)
- **Household tasks:** Encourage boys and girls to help with household tasks and learn to be self-reliant and responsible by cleaning up, preparing meals, and doing what is asked of them.

In short, encourage children to be more aspirational in their choices and help them to think about jobs they might not have considered which reflect their interests rather than their gender. Focus on helping grandchildren to explore careers with questions like:

- What is it about this work or job that particularly appeals to you? (identify attributes that are important).
- What do you think would make you good at this job? (help them identify their skills and strengths.)
- What do you think would be the downside of this job? (help them to make a realistic assessment).

Next we'll explore a range of literacies. All of them are important and need to be encouraged.



**Q.** What do conchologists do?

**R.** Learn more about [Australian seashells.](#)

**R.** Discover extraordinary Australian women at the ABC's [Fierce Girls Series.](#)

## 12. Literacies

To function well in the 21st century a person must possess a wide range of abilities and competencies. These are sometimes referred to as ‘literacies’.

[Literacy](#) has several meanings. In common usage it refers to the skills associated with reading, writing, and speaking. It has, however, as pointed out by speakers at ACER’s [Research Conference 2019](#), changed during recent decades. In the past, literacy was defined as referring to the ability to understand and use information found in a range of materials, such as newspapers, magazines and brochures, as well as in various formats, such as maps, charts, timetables. Now, literacy also includes the ability to search for and extract information from digital sources using skills in analysing, selecting and critiquing information.

Numeracy refers to being able to process, interpret and communicate numerical, quantitative, spatial and statistical information. It also includes the ability to access, use, interpret and communicate mathematical information and ideas.

A person may be able to read and write simple words, but may not be able to apply these skills to everyday tasks like reading a medicine label, filling out a home loan application, voting in elections, comparing the cost of two items, analyzing media and advertising messages, and helping children with homework. This functional illiteracy has [huge costs](#), including the costs of welfare, unemployment, crime and social programs, as well as the social costs of exclusion, lack of income, poor health, and low civic participation.

Literacy is also used to refer to other skills, such as digital literacy, media literacy and financial literacy. People need multiple literacies, that is, ways of reading the world, in order to make sense of specific contexts, such as social media, health, science, and finances.

Recent reports focus on specific forms of literacy and identify the range of skills needed to both personally negotiate the area and to work in related fields. While these literacies are discussed separately, most are interrelated.

These literacies are critical resources for everyday living and for participating fully in the community. The following chapters set out some of the critical literacies relevant to today’s children and offers suggestions on how to encourage grandchildren’s interests and abilities.



## 12.1 Science literacy

To help children understand what science is, let's start with some basics.

Much of the material about science literacy and [occupations](#) refers to STEM, which stands for science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

Young people may have misconceptions about careers in science and engineering, not realising that there is a wide range of work available, that many engineers are engaged in design or undertaking work that helps save lives, and that scientists are much more than white men in lab coats—the typical stereotypical view.

While most people acknowledge that science and technology are important to everyday life, researchers have found that people associate science with concrete scientific disciplines, such as physics and biology, rather than with a general approach to the world, and technology with applications of science, particularly computers.

People may think that science follows a linear set of steps when studying nature. This is a simplified, rigid and inaccurate picture of the scientific method, although it does capture the core logic of testing ideas with evidence. In reality, scientists' work involves different sequences, repeating steps, and working with different people at different times, often demanding creativity to complete their work.

Some of the most [important characteristics](#) of science are straightforward:

- Science focuses on the natural world, learning about what is in the natural world, how it works, and how the natural world got to be the way it is.
- Scientists work in many different ways, but all science relies on testing ideas and making observations to see if ideas hold true. It is not simply about collecting facts; rather it is a means to understanding how the natural world works.
- Accepted scientific ideas are reliable because they have been subjected to rigorous testing, but as new evidence is acquired and new perspectives emerge these ideas can be revised. With a system of checks and balances, science moves towards greater accuracy and understanding.
- Scientific conclusions are revised if warranted by the evidence.

A wide range of occupations draw on knowledge and understanding of science, technology and maths, either directly or indirectly. STEM occupations can be thought of as a continuum, from those like pharmacists and laboratory technicians, where the practice of science, technology and/or mathematics is the main focus, through critical roles like nurses and science teachers where such knowledge or practice is critical for being competent, to occupations like hairdressers and forestry managers whose knowledge or practice improves the ability to perform the role but is not central.



We're exposed to many scientific messages in advertising, reporting, political commentary, and social media. Understanding the nature of science can help with evaluating the research and the accuracy of these messages, particularly when the science is contested. This is likely to happen when issues have potential impacts on businesses and governments, such as climate change, environmental damage from feral animals like brumbies, managing water supply.

Assessing contested science is an important aspect of science literacy and draws on digital and media literacy skills (see Chapter 12.3). Being able to assess efforts to discredit scientists, their methods and findings, is an essential skill for judging who and what to believe. [Understanding Science](#), a valuable American online resource, provides a useful set of questions you can use for evaluating messages that contest scientific evidence:

- "Where does the information come from?
- Are the views of the scientific community accurately portrayed?
- Is the scientific community's confidence in the ideas accurately portrayed?
- Is the controversy misrepresented or blown out of proportion?
- Where can I get more information?
- How strong is the evidence?"

These questions also apply to advertising. Products that make 'scientific' claims, also need to be examined for evidence and accuracy. Products may claim to be based on scientific research or proven in some way by scientists. Ads may use people in white coats, show laboratory scenes with test tubes and other equipment. Note here, that 'scientist in white coat' is a stereotype. Not all scientists wear them, and those that do may not do so all the time.

Take just one area of advertising—cosmetics. A [study](#) of 300 cosmetics magazine ads found most of their science claims were either false or too vague to judge. Using terms like 'clinically proven', 'breakthrough technology', and 'ten years of genetic research', ads sound like science but in fact most claims are not true.

Some questions you can raise about 'scientific' claims for products are:

- What scientific knowledge is needed in order to assess whether the product can achieve its claims?
- Are there sound physiological reasons for using this product?
- Can products really do what they claim to do?
- What is meant by 'natural'?
- Why do we think it's important to be skinny, muscular, wrinkle-free, hairless, tanned, youthful, odour-free?

Much attention has been given to women in STEM careers. The [Australian Chief Scientist](#) has devoted much attention to encouraging more girls to study science and mathematics, and has published material busting some of the myths about women. Findings include:

- There is no gender difference in mathematics ability.

- Women’s participation in STEM increases in inclusive cultural environments.
- Women in STEM earn less than their male colleagues.
- While there have been improvements in the treatment of women in science, there is still a long way to go.

The [authors](#) conclude that:

“Women are not inherently less capable or less interested in STEM than men, and the problem of gender imbalance is not impossible to solve. There is nothing inevitable about inequality. “

“However, divergent attitudes formed by girls and boys in childhood—such as confidence in their abilities to apply mathematics to problem solving—have far reaching implications for the opportunities available to them in adulthood. Australia’s future wellbeing and advancement will be built upon a STEM literate workforce: to succeed, this workforce must fully engage women.”

Girls need to see women in STEM roles so that they can believe that these careers are for people like them. They also need to build confidence in their abilities. Parental expectations can also affect girls’ choices, with parents tending to expect sons rather than daughters to work in a STEM field.

As what we do each day depends on science, there is plenty of scope to encourage children to observe (see, hear, touch, taste), collect, test, record, explore and think.

- Nature: observe colour, texture, size, shape, animals, birds, insects, plants, frogs.
- Gardening: explore trees, flowers, fruit, [soil](#), [tools](#).
- Cooking: explain equipment and how to measure ingredients.
- [Weather](#): observe clouds and what they mean; explain temperature, air pressure; learn how to read a weather map.
- Seasons: observe changes and what they mean; learn about [Indigenous weather knowledge](#).
- Sky: observe the stars, moon, and planets; explain their relationship to each other.
- Equipment: encourage using tools and equipment.
- Become a [citizen scientist](#), such as with [Frog Watch](#) and [Aussie Backyard Bird Count](#).
- Get involved in [world events](#):
  - World Oceans Day (8 June)
  - World Environment Day (5 June)
  - World Soil Day (5 December)
  - World Space Week (4-10 October)
- Explore [occupations](#) that involve science, maths and engineering such as draftsman, metallurgical technician, shipwright, town planner, marine scientist, ecologist, zoologist, tree surgeon, speech pathologist, microbiologist, environmental engineer, investment analyst, stockbroker.
- Ask curious ‘why’ questions and find the answers at [Curious Kids](#), such as:
  - What is the Earth made of?
  - How big is the International Space Station?

- What has the search for extraterrestrial life actually yielded and how does it work?
- Which is smarter—a blue whale or an orca?
- Can people colonise Mars?
- Ask open-ended questions, regardless of how strange or outlandish grandchildren's views might be. Examples of such questions are:
  - What ideas do you have?
  - What do you think is happening here?
  - How would you solve this problem?
  - Where do you think we might look to find out how to solve this problem?
  - If we do this, what do you think will happen?
  - What other ideas could we try?
- And in response to their answers, you might say:
  - Tell me why you think that.
  - How did you arrive at that idea?



**Q.** Why don't cranes fall over?

How do you become a crane operator?

**R.** Discover [50 Things that made the modern economy](#) including Pencil, Brick, GPS, Canned Food, S-Bend, Radar, Cellophane, Glasses.

## 12.2 Numeracy

Numeracy is an essential foundation skill. According to the [Australian Curriculum](#), numeracy is made up of six interrelated ideas:

- Estimating and calculating with whole numbers.
- Recognising and using patterns and relationships.
- Using fractions, decimals, percentages, ratios and rates.
- Using spatial reasoning.
- Interpreting statistical information.
- Using measurement.

In short, numeracy is the set of maths skills that you use in everyday life.

In practical, everyday terms, numeracy is:

- Calculating the odds of winning the lottery.
- Reading a bus timetable.
- Working out what time it is in Greenland.
- Calculating how many dollars you'll take on holiday given a certain exchange rate.
- Measuring how much soil you'll need for a new vegetable garden.
- Interpreting graphs to decide whether to buy some stocks.
- Analysing information, such as how many wins does my team need to get to the top of the competition?
- Making choices, such as which bike is the best value?

These practical skills are not confined to maths classes. Numeracy is learnt in a range of subjects such as history, geography, civics and citizenship, and economics and business when learning how to read maps, interpret graphs, identify trends, calculate profit and return on investment.

There is much grandparents can do with children to help them build numeracy skills, including estimation; mental calculation; recognising shapes, size, length, mass, volume, time, temperature; reading maps, diagrams, directions, charts, and tables. Examples are:

- Working out the amount of paint needed to cover a room or the amount of lawn seed needed for a rectangular lawn.
- Drawing up a scale plan needed for constructing a child's playhouse or a garden shed.
- Planning a barbeque, or running a sports competition.
- Watching [Eddy Woo's](#) maths video clips.
- Working out how many sweets \$6.75 will buy.
- Comparing labels in the supermarket to see which product has less sugar per 100g.
- Solving problems, such as which brand and size of tinned fruit is the cheapest.
- Exploring [occupations](#) that involve maths, such as stock and station agent, purchasing officer, meteorological officer, naval architect, automotive electrician, accounts clerk, auditor, air traffic controller.

- Reading a map to calculate how long a journey will take or which is the shortest route to take.



**Q.** What skills would it take to create public art like this sculpture?



**Q.** How do you play this game?

## 12.3 Digital and Media Literacy

Given the digital nature of so much media, it's worth considering digital and media literacy together.

The scope of digital skills has expanded in recent years to cover a range of skills that people need in order to conduct daily tasks and meet general workforce requirements, plus more specialised skills for Information and Communications Technology (ICT) professionals.

Digital literacy is essential not just for work, but has much broader implications for citizenship, social and economic inclusion. Digital skills are used for social interaction (e.g. smartphone usage), for interaction with systems and services (e.g. e-commerce and e-government services) and for accessing services and important information (e.g. e-health).

[NCVER research](#) suggests digital skills cover those skills:

- needed to understand and operate digital devices, software and systems.
- used to work with data and information.
- pertaining to security and the ability to learn and adapt.
- used to troubleshoot and resolve work-related problems.

Plus, this research identified the top five technologies with the greatest impact on skill requirements across Australian industries: mobile, cloud, automation, big data and the internet of things.

It's important for children to learn digital skills and to understand that these skills will change over time and need updating. Many of the skills needed are not limited to working with information and computers. These skills and abilities include creativity, problem solving, collaboration, and knowledge of digital security, safety and ethical responsibility.

Some children may think they won't need digital skills, perhaps because they focus on occupations that involve 'working with my hands'. The reality is that many jobs previously unaffected by technology now need digital skills. Car mechanics is a good example.

Media literacy is about understanding the role and functions of media in democratic societies, being able to critically evaluate media content, and engage with media for self-expression and democratic participation. This literacy is related to information and digital literacy as much news, a staple of the media, is accessed online. People need to be able to define their information needs, locate, access and assess information, make ethical use of information, and use ICT skills.

The media covers television, radio, film, newspapers and magazines, as these deliver news and information to large numbers of people. It also includes recorded music, and outdoor media such as billboards. There are many [occupations](#) in the media, including journalist, editor, camera operator, script writer, actor, disc jockey and costume maker.

Children learn much about jobs from the media. Inaccurate ideas can be gained about police work, paramedics, hospitals, forensic laboratories from watching television programs. Gender stereotypes can also be reinforced.

News literacy is particularly important in assessing the accuracy and validity of information provided both through the media and online via social media.

In [September 2017](#) a nationally representative sample of 1,000 young Australians aged 8-16 years was surveyed to understand their news engagement practices and experiences. Just one third of young people believe they know how to tell fake news from real news (34%), with children being much less confident about this than teens (27% compared with 43%). However, more than half of young Australians don't critique the source of news they encounter online (32% pay very little attention and 14% pay no attention at all). Just under half say they often or sometimes try to work out if a news story they encounter online is true or not (46%).

Grandparents can help children develop their critical thinking by asking these questions suggested by researchers [Nettleford and Williams](#):

- "Who wrote this?
- How reliable a source is this?
- Who's the intended audience?
- Who and what is included/excluded?
- What techniques are being used?
- Whose voice is being privileged or silenced?"

Numerical literacy is relevant to understanding news and information. For example, one way people try to persuade others to a viewpoint is to misuse statistics. The UK House of Commons Library offers useful [guides](#) to spotting spin and inappropriate use of statistics. A [guide on spotting spin](#) suggest three essential questions to ask when looking at statistics:

- Compared to what?
- Since when?
- Says who?

The [guide](#) also helps with spurious comparisons, selective quoting, focusing on the anecdotal, misusing terms such as correlation and causation, mean and median, and not providing details about methodology, such as sample size and questions asked in surveys.

General questions they suggest to ask are:

- "What product or point of view is the author trying to 'sell'?
- Are there any statistics or background that is obviously missing?
- Do the author's conclusions logically follow from the statistics?
- Are comparisons made like-for-like?
- If there is any doubt about the original source of the statistic –Who created them and how, why and when were they created?"

The internet provides children with a wide range of opportunities for social connection, self-expression, learning and entertainment. At the same time, being online is not without its risks. A [UNICEF publication](#) identifies three forms of risk encountered online concerning content, contact, and conduct.

- Content risks: Where a child is exposed to unwelcome and inappropriate content.
- Contact risks: Where a child participates in risky communication, such as with an adult seeking inappropriate contact.
- Conduct risks: Where a child behaves in a way that contributes to risky content or contact.

[Research](#) by the Office of the eSafety Commissioner established that almost all parents (94%) regard their child's online safety as being important. Parents had a number of concerns about their child being online and the common ones related to these three risks. Should any of these topics come up it's worth knowing some resources that can help. The [eSafety Commissioner](#) provides valuable advice and SBS provides resources linked to its series [The Hunting](#).

Other activities related to digital and media literacy are:

- Explore [occupations](#) in media such as announcer, web designer, sound technician, journalist, producer, disc jockey, editor, camera operator.
- Explore the tools available on the government's [esafety website](#).
- As you watch television programs that portray an occupation, discuss how realistic it is. And do computers really work as fast as they do in NCIS?



**Q.** Why do some trees lose their leaves?

**R.** Explore science, including the weather, fossils, and planets with the [ABC's Science](#) website.



## 12.4 Financial literacy

Teaching children about money is important. As the Australian government's [MoneySmart](#) website points out, "If kids develop good financial skills from an early age they'll be ready for the financial challenges of adulthood... Showing children the basics such as how to budget, spend and save will establish good money habits for life."

A Canadian Taskforce on Financial Literacy [report](#) defines financial literacy as "the knowledge, skills and confidence to make responsible financial decisions," where:

- "knowledge refers to an understanding of personal and broader financial matters;
- skills refer to the ability to apply that financial knowledge in everyday life;
- confidence means having the self-assurance to make important decisions; and
- responsible financial decisions refers to the ability of individuals to use the knowledge, skills and confidence they have gained to make choices appropriate to their own circumstances.'

We all hold beliefs about money, drawn from personal experience, other people's comments, media messages, and cultural and religious influences. We may be anxious about money, lack confidence about our ability to make financial decisions, regard money positively or negatively, hold back from developing money management skills because 'it's too hard' or 'I'm no good at maths' or 'I'll leave it to someone else to take care of'.

These beliefs are unhelpful to young people. [Canadian research](#) into financial independence and well-being for the next generation suggests there is a need to change how finances are discussed. Much of the discussion is framed negatively ('you're in serious trouble'), fostering a stigma of shame. The researchers suggest that financial literacy needs to be empowering, with central messages focused on independence, having control over finances, being able to achieve dreams, and understanding that planning and saving are needed to achieve both short- and long-term financial goals.

Teaching children the value of money through real life situations and examples will help them understand where money comes from and how it is earned. The [MoneySmart](#) website offers ideas on how to teach children about money. For example, explaining how an ATM works—that it holds the money you have made by working hard and saving. When you take money out of the ATM it is taken from your bank account and you'll have less in your account to spend later.

When buying items at the supermarket, you can explain how items are priced and how to shop around for the best price. Other opportunities arise when paying bills, planning an event, comparing ads, and spontaneous spending. Help children to set a goal and track their savings and their spending.

You can also explore finance-related [occupations](#) such as actuary, bookkeeper, accountant, financial advisor, insurance broker, banker.

## 12.5 Civics Literacy

[Civics literacy](#) is about developing a sense of belonging to and engagement with civic life as an active and informed citizen of Australia. It includes understanding and appreciating the values, principles, institutions and practices of Australia's system of democratic government and law, and the role of the citizen in Australian government and society and in initiating change. It also includes an understanding of Indigenous history and cultures, and of Australian diversity.

Many skills developed in other literacies are relevant here, including questioning, researching, analysis and interpretation, problem solving, decision-making, communication and reflection, plus an ability to discuss politics. Civics literacy is particularly important in the context of declining trust in civic institutions, questioning of democracy, and the spread of false and fake news and information.

Grandparents can foster an interest in how Australian society works by:

- Sharing knowledge of your volunteering in the local community and encouraging volunteering.
- Developing an interest in a local, national or international issue.
- Noting who receives awards like [Australian of the Year](#).
- Making site visits to democratic institutions, such as Commonwealth, state or territory houses of parliament, local council chambers or law courts.
- Exploring the effectiveness of protests here and abroad.
- Investigating why and how new laws are made.
- Encouraging children to make the most of any visit they make to Canberra.
- Comparing Australia's system of democratic elections with those in other countries.
- Discussing political rights to freedom of speech, freedom of movement and freedom of the press in Australia and other countries.
- Encouraging an understanding of Indigenous culture and history by, for example:
  - reading signage about local Aboriginal history
  - appreciating observance days such as [National Sorry Day](#) (26 May) [Reconciliation Day](#) (1 June), [First Day of NAIDOC Week](#) (5 July)
- Demonstrating behaviours that impact the community, such as:
  - picking up rubbish
  - obeying road rules
  - controlling dogs and picking up their droppings
  - minimising noise
  - respecting all work and its value.
- Noticing and participating in relevant [United Nations International Days and Weeks](#), such as:
  - International Women's Day (8 March)
  - International Day of Democracy (15 September)
  - International Day of Peace 21 September)
  - Human Rights Day (5 December)
  - World Harmony Week (1-7 February)
- Learning to say hello in several [languages](#).

- Exploring [occupations](#) such as anthropologist, archaeologist, cultural heritage officer, diplomat, historian, museum technician, library assistant, court reporter, tour guide, photographer.

Given the importance of social skills, one skill that grandparents can foster is kindness. UK [research](#) into young people's views about kindness found several factors affected whether they were likely to act kindly:

- **Kindness as a learnt behaviour:** Young people thought that a person who had experience of others being kind to them and witnessed acts of kindness regularly would be more likely to be kind to others.
- **Social pressure:** For many young people, especially those at school, kindness was not a popular behaviour among peers. There was social pressure to not be kind, with young people worried about being labelled 'teacher's pet' or being laughed at if they are kind.
- **Mental health and emotional wellbeing:** A range of factors to do with a person's psychological and emotional state, such as being in a bad mood, feeling stressed, not trusting someone, and feeling angry, were cited as influencing a decision on whether to act kindly.

Grandparents can therefore offer examples and experiences of kindness, such as:

- Being polite and showing good manners.
- Complimenting people.
- Gift-giving.
- Helping those in need.
- Donating to charity.
- Accepting other people.
- Volunteering in the local community.
- Showing how to resolve conflict.
- Offering genuine [apologies](#).
- Forgiving each other.
- Standing up for oneself.
- Identifying values.
- Thinking about the consequences of an action.

**R.** The ABC's [Behind the News](#)

helps with understanding what's going on in the world and how to build [media literacy](#).

## 12.6 Health and Wellbeing Literacy

[Health literacy](#) is about people finding, understanding and assessing good health information, using it to make informed decisions, and acting upon these decisions to manage one's health and wellbeing. It also includes the ability to navigate the healthcare system, and engage with healthcare providers.

In Australia, it's [estimated](#) that 60% of people have less than adequate levels of health literacy. Low health literacy is a risk factor for poor health. It can affect people's ability to find the right health care, understand medical instructions, and manage their own health. This, in turn, can increase the risk of people needing emergency care, being hospitalised, mismanaging their medication and not understanding their disease or condition. Low health literacy can also be associated with premature death among older people, and lower participation in preventative programs (including influenza vaccination and cervical and breast cancer screening).

There are significant issues affecting the health and wellbeing of young people. The 2019 [Youth Mental Health Report](#) highlights the growing prevalence of poor mental health among young people in Australia. Almost one quarter (24.2%) of 15- to 19-year-olds met the criteria for psychological distress, a statistic that has consistently risen since 2012.

As [Beyondblue](#) explains, mental health does not mean mental health conditions, such as anxiety. Rather, mental health, as defined by the World Health Organization, refers to "a state of well-being in which every individual realises his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community." So mental health is about the way we think, feel and develop relationships. It's much more than an absence of a mental health condition.

More than a [quarter of Australian children](#) are overweight or obese and each day are exposed to a huge amount of unhealthy food marketing. This makes eating well a challenge.

A [study](#) of the physical activity of Queensland children points out that physically active children experience cardiovascular health, musculoskeletal strength and positive psychosocial benefits. The physical and mental benefits of sport and active free play continue throughout life. Those who are physically active in childhood are more likely to continue these habits into adulthood.

Sport Australia has produced an [Australian Physical Literacy Framework](#) which explains that physical literacy is about "building the skills, knowledge and behaviours to help us lead active lives".

The Framework sets out what children should be learning through movement at different stages of development. The Framework covers four domains and their associated elements:

- Physical movement and its links to coordination, balance, agility, speed.
- Attitudes and emotions about movement and their impact on confidence and motivation.

- Social interaction with others.
- A person's understanding of how, why and when they move.

Health literacy is linked to other literacies, including numeracy, digital and media, and science literacy. For example, a person will have difficulty sourcing useful health information if they have poor skills in these other literacies.

Grandparents can help foster health literacy by:

- Participating in and encouraging outdoor activity.
- Building an understanding of how the body works and the importance of taking care of the body.
- Being a good example of how to manage one's health and wellbeing.
- Using sun protection when outdoors.
- Encouraging children to have a go at many physical activities.
- Eating well, and encouraging children to try a range of foods.
- Making meal time special.
- Noticing and participating in relevant [United Nations International Days](#), such as:
  - World Cancer Day (4 February)
  - International Day of Happiness (20 March)
  - World Health Day (7 April)
  - World Blood Donor Day (14 June) and
  - local [health awareness programs](#) (World's Greatest Shave, Australia's Biggest Morning Tea, Red Nose Day, Jeans for Genes Day).
- Exploring health, physical education, outdoor and food studies [occupations](#), such as paramedic, dental assistant, midwife, dietician, forester, fisher, baker, biochemist, animal trainer, surveyor, fitness instructor, sports coach.
- Asking curious 'why' questions and finding answers at [Curious Kids](#), such as:
  - Why do I have boogies and why does my nose keep replicating them?
  - Why are some twins identical and some not?
  - Where do phobias come from?
  - Why do burps make noise?



Why does a slide become hot in the sun?

## 12.7 Arts and Culture Literacy

Australians think the arts are important, and they participate in the arts a lot, with 98 per cent of the population engaging with the arts in some way and one in four Australians giving time or money to the arts. Younger Australians (aged 15-24 years) create and experience the arts at the highest rates.

Cultural activity is much more important to the economy than most of us realise. According to [government research](#), cultural and creativity activity contributed \$111 billion to the economy in 2016-17. Cultural and creative industries include museums, environmental heritage, libraries and archives, literature and print media, performing arts (theatre, dance, music), design, visual arts (drawing, painting, sculpture) and crafts, fashion, music composition and publishing, and broadcasting and film. Alison Croggon in her article on the decline of funding for the arts, points out that the contribution of cultural and creative industries to the economy in 2016-17 was almost twice the contribution of agriculture, fishing and forestry, and more than half that of the mining industry.

Whether you produce artistic works, participate in cultural activity, or attend arts events and festivals, you can help foster your grandchildren's knowledge and appreciation of the arts and the many careers available in this sector. Suggestions are:

- Discuss musical preferences and musical concepts.
- Visit a gallery and discuss works of art. Blogger [Cindy Ingram](#) suggests you only need to use three questions when looking at art:
  - "What's going on?"
  - What do you see that makes you say that?
  - And what more can you find?"
- Sing together.
- Examine public works of art that you see in the street.
- Examine 'graffiti' and street art and explore the skill involved as well as the idea of when is art, art?
- Explore [occupations](#) in the performing arts, entertainment, art, industrial arts, textiles and design, such as actor, wardrobe supervisor, writer, costume maker, animator, dancer, musician, dressmaker, fashion designer, set designer, landscape architect, civil engineer, cartographer, jeweller.
- Visit your local library and see what activities they offer for children.

And there's more ...

I could slice the literacy pie further to explore historical, social, environmental literacies and more. However, what's important is to appreciate the value, relevance and application of all areas of knowledge and to encourage grandchildren to explore as wide a range as possible.

## 13. Talking to people about the work they do

Talking to people about the work they do is called career informational interviewing. To help with choosing useful questions to ask, I've drawn on my ebook *Informational Interviewing: How to interview people to inform career decisions*. The questions are grouped under headings with a brief explanation of what value they provide. You can use these questions to learn about different types of jobs, thereby expanding children's sense of what's available and possible.

### What do you do?

*Why ask these questions?*

To learn about the reality of what a person does, the range of duties involved and what gives satisfaction.

1. What do you do in your current job?
2. How did you get this job?
3. Do you like your job?
4. What opportunities does it give you?
5. Would you like to change anything in your job?
6. What is most important to you in this job?
7. What gives you a sense of satisfaction?

### A typical day

*Why ask these questions?*

To find out what an ordinary day is like. This information gives an idea of the highs and lows of a job.

1. What does a day in the life of a xxx look like?
2. Do you work alone or as part of a team?
3. What makes for a good day?
4. What parts of your work don't you like?

### Exploring a person's career

*Why ask these questions?*

To learn from a person's hindsight and about how a career changes.

1. What was your last job?
2. What was your first job?
3. Has your job changed over the years?
4. Are you working in the field of your qualifications?
5. If not, why did you change?
6. What further study have you undertaken?

7. Looking back is there anything you would do differently?
8. Are there any career decisions you've made that you now regret?
9. What have been the best career decisions you have made?
10. Are there any lessons you have learnt from these decisions?
11. What is the worst job you've had?
12. What was the most difficult aspect of gaining entry to this field?

### **Personal satisfaction**

*Why ask these questions?*

To find out what gives satisfaction from working in a particular field.

1. What gives you the most satisfaction from your current job?
2. Which job did you gain the most satisfaction from?
3. Do you feel you have made a difference?
4. How do you know you have made a difference?
5. What's your definition of success?

### **Exploring qualifications**

*Why ask these questions?*

Many people end up working in areas other than what they are qualified in. Qualifications can become obsolete and need updating. Qualifications may need to be complemented by further study. Life-long learning is a part of managing a career.

1. How easily did you find work related to your qualifications?
2. Are you working in the area of your original studies?
3. What led you to work in a field other than your original qualifications?
4. What aspects of your qualifications have dated, or become obsolete?
5. How has the field changed during your career?
6. How have you needed to up-date your qualifications?
7. Have you added new qualifications?

### **Exploring skills**

*Why ask these questions?*

To learn that skills are not static.

1. What skills have you most used in your current work?
2. What new skills have you gained over the last three years?
3. What skills do you no longer use?
4. What skills do you think are most important to build, regardless of the role?



## **Exploring barriers**

*Why ask these questions?*

Your ideal field may not be easy to find work in. You may learn of obstacles you hadn't thought of.

1. Did you face any obstacles finding work in your chosen career/field?
2. How did you overcome these obstacles?
3. Did you face any obstacles once you started work in this field?
4. How did you overcome these obstacles?
5. Were any of these obstacles insurmountable?
6. What tips would you give about handling obstacles?

## **Making decisions**

*Why ask these questions?*

To understand factors that influence a person's choices and how people make career decisions.

1. What factors influenced you in your choice of career?
2. How important was family, education, friends in influencing your choice?
3. Which factor/s was the main influence on your decision?
4. Did anyone have a negative influence on your choices?
5. How long did it take to make a decision?

## **Changing career direction**

*Why ask these questions?*

To understand what is involved in changing career direction.

1. Have you changed direction, taken a different path, entered new fields during your career?
2. What factors influenced your decision to make these changes?
3. What gave you the confidence to make these changes?
4. Did this change mean retraining?
5. Did you receive any help with making this decision to change direction?
6. Was this change your choice or was it imposed on you?
7. How long did it take to complete the change?

## **Business owners**

*Why ask these questions?*

Being employed by someone is only one way to work. Owning and operating a business is another way to work in your chosen field. Learning how people start a business and how

operating a business is different to being employed offers different opportunities that may suit you better.

1. How did you get started in your business?
2. What attracted you to starting a business?
3. What challenges did you face when starting your business?
4. What skills are needed to start a business?
5. How does owning and operating a business differ from being employed?
6. How has your business changed over the years?



**Q.** Is this art?

## **14. Epilogue**

Grandparents can have a big impact on their grandchildren's belief in themselves, on the scope of their horizons, and on the development of their social skills—all essential for being able to manage their careers throughout their life.

Since children form ideas early in life about jobs and work it's useful to have some knowledge of how work has changed, what it means to manage a career, and why social skills are important regardless of what a person does in life. This ebook has covered a lot of material on these topics and I hope, by seeing how so many everyday activities can offer opportunities to explore, discover, and expand a child's outlook, you can have a positive influence. In short, by combining your life's wisdom with some career-related knowledge, you can have an inspiring impact.

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## 16. About the Author

Australia's only *Mental Nutritionist*®, Dr Villiers is a Fellow Member of the Career Development Association of Australia (CDAA), specialising in helping people to think more flexibly and speak more confidently by mastering mind and language sense making practices.

Ann pioneered the concept of *Mental Nutrition*® to capture the essentials of how we manage meaning and make sense of our encounters with people. Being mindful of our thinking and building skills in managing meaning are high-order capabilities vital for communicating effectively.

Ann is a career coach, specialising in the public sector, a writer and author. Her current work is preceded by professional speaking, public service management and academic careers.

In 2019 Ann was awarded Life Membership of the Career Development Association of Australia, and in 2015 was awarded the CDAA President's Award for Professional Leadership.

Dr Villiers lives in Australia's national capital, enjoying all the sense making that Canberra has to offer.

For further information visit <https://www.selectioncriteria.com.au>